Informant: LMP-S12 **English**
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S12: I guess we're on stomachache. All right, stomachache, or (***dolor de estomago***)- uhm, this is a very generic way of describing many things. It can be due to many things. It can be due to indigestion. It can be due to an upset nervous system. It can be due to a Mexican-American illness called fright (***susto***). So many times, many of these illnesses here, even though they are specific, at least from the standpoint of the Lucumi community, usually you have to find out one thing, if it is a physical occurrence, or if it is supernaturally induced because they are different. If you have a supernatural element that is inducing or provoking this type of illness, then have to treat the supernatural aspect of it and then see what is left and then treat whatever is left of that condition. So, assuming that the stomachache is due to indigestion or due to an upset lifestyle, nervousness and stuff like that. Then, there are many plants that you can take. You can take (***orochun***), you can take rosemary (***romerillo***), usually as a tea. You can also deal with it with some kind of liquid diet, if it is due to indigestion. Some people might treat stomachache by using plants, herbal teas, and a combination of certain type of changes in the diet. So, for example, changing the intake of specific foods – usually there is too much meat in the diet. Beans are a great source of problems of gas. So, usually, when it comes to that, the first thing the person might ask is what are you eating?
That is a very common occurrence, here because of change of diets. A lot of stomach problems, stomachaches, inflated stomach, viruses, diarrhea, all kinds of stuff and usually they are due to gastric dietary changes, dietary changes due to the fact that we have so much stuff here that we can get to eat and people that are not used to certain particular ways of preparing food or whatever and so that changes a diet, and at the same time styles in feeding. You know people don't have time due to the type of work they do. They just have something in the morning and then they don't have anything all the way until late in the evening, when they go back home. Many of these people are laborers. They might have a one hour lunch but they might choose to work through that hour to make a little more money or they might choose not to eat because they don't want to spend that money on eating or they might chose to wait until they get home. So, in that sense, sometimes, it's because there's a whole spectrum of situations that creates stomach problems. Many of them, also, like I said, are due to dietary changes because people are not used to certain condiments and they might try whatever and then these changes upset the system until the system gets used to it and then you try to fall back into whatever. So, all these issues are part of that. The most common way of treating a stomachache that I know of and I have heard people use are usually a combination of herbal remedies-like drinking certain teas, certain infusions, like rosemary (***romerillo***), ***(orochun***), penny-royal ***(poleo***) or ***(epazote***). There are certain teas that will bring back the stomach back to normal. As a reflux it's basically treated as part of it unless it is in children. In children it is usually a sign of a more serious condition. But as a reflux, again, it goes back to what people eat and how they eat and all those things that have to do with the stomach. If they are not supernaturally created, then there are specific ailments that everybody knows about, that they prescribe to themselves, and when things persist then they decide to go and see a healer. Usually people diagnose themselves and go and take whatever. The problem with this is that they are getting mixed with over the counter [???] and then sometimes you don't know if it makes it better or worse. Many times this kind of acid

reflux is due to ulcers. I see people that usually have an incidence of ulcers-stomach ulcers or stuff like that, that are in the beginning stages and again you have to get into the eating patterns-what are they eating. First, one of the biggest problems is the spices. There is a big emphasis on spicing up food. Sometimes its ok but for some reason the way things used to be-well I don't know, but I think sometimes we are getting hot food, spicy food [???] it doesn't work the same. People that are used to eating almost everything spicy, they come here and they can't even eat it, or it just doesn't sit well. Not everyone but many times it just takes the time of you informing the people that they are going to use this treatment to flush out whatever and restore the balance. Another good plant for treating stomach problems is Aloe Vera because Aloe Vera tends to create a soothing coating of the intestines so I see a lot of people drinking or eating Aloe Vera as a way of alleviating stomach problems. With gas, the universal is "Star Anise" **(anis estrella**).

MOJ: Star Anise?

S12: Yeah, that's the universal. Whenever people are bloated with gas, usually the universal, the first line of attack is "Star Anise." It's very good for gas.

MOJ: How much of it?

S12: Usually you can use one star per cup. You take a cup of water, you boil it with anise star.

MOJ: What part of plant is this?

S12: It looks like a star. It is shaped like a star. It's called Star Anise. It's a star shaped seed.

MOJ: What size?

S12: It's about half an inch. It has about six or seven spikes. It looks just like a star and that is the seed part. Each of the spikes has one seed. If that doesn't work - because with gas – well there are different kinds of gas, there's stomach gas, the usual gas we typically get. But sometimes people get what they call "air" in muscles, some ach in the body recognized as air and that is also considered a problem and star anise is very good for that.

MOJ: Do you just drink it?

S12: Just drink it. Everyone knows that.

MOJ: How much of it do I drink and for how long?

S12: Usually you take a couple of cups and that will take care of it if it is just a mild case, like for example, you eat beans and absorb gas and stuff like that, some gassy food. For this, star anise is usually the choice. Everybody knows and it's everyone's remedy. Then after that you have other remedies that have to do, you have remedies that have to do with infusions and have to do with - I heard someone say that the best thing for gas is

to eat bread, especially the inside of the bread because it will soak any acid that you have in your stomach but maybe it's a good excuse to eat bread (laughs) but some people say that, that if you eat the inside of the bread it will soak up the acid that created the gas, so that's the whole explanation behind that.

MOJ: Back to the air, how does one know that one has air, what does it feel like?

S12: It's like a bother that you have like a muscle ache. If you know you haven't strained yourself, like perhaps you slept in a very bad position and you have this bothersome feeling that doesn't let you move your arm and lift it, or just move any part of the body, then the person will say they know the air has gotten and you have to bring it out by taking star anise and massaging the area and stuff like that. So you know, usually star anise is the universal remedy and then of coarse, depending on each one of the – uhhm – people may have other things to do with it. It depends on the, if it's stomach-related then you use star anise. If it's air that you might have caught in your neck, underneath here in your ribs, in the back – it depends where the air is located, you have to bend it out of there and get rid of it.

MOJ: How do you bring it out?

S12: It can come out as a burp, or you can pass gas. It has to come out some way, but it will come out some way and usually that is what you do. People drink something to bring it out, usually as a burp, a burping type of situation. Also, a big, big problem in this area is, again, the lifestyle. Unfortunately, it's hard to prescribe things. But, some people might take, for ulcers, usually the best thing is, again, Aloe Vera, or (***Cundeamor***), which is a tropical plant from the Caribbean- (***Cundeamor***).

MOJ: How do you spell it?

S12: **C – U – N – D – E – A – M – O – R.** It's one word. Also, Aloe Vera is very good for ulcers. Also, the (***Nopal)-*** the tuna (the f ruit of the Nopal). Any kind of plant that has a heavy coating ability to aid in healing the ulcer.

MOJ: Did you say "negal"?

S12: Nopal, nopal.

MOJ: Nopal?

S12: ***Nopal***, yeah, usually taken in juices or eaten in a salad and stuff like that. These plants have the ability to coat the stomach, known as ***(cubrir el estomago*)**: coating the stomach, allowing the ulcer to heal and at the same time preventing the gastric acids further eroding or making the ulcer bigger. There are so many remedies for ulcers, that almost everyone will give you a recipe for it. The main one, I am very partial to Aloe Vera because I think it's the best that works for me – Aloe Vera, the gel, taken before meals to create that coating, and definitely, again, you have to stay away from spicy foods.
(Telephone interruption)

MOJ: So, where were we?
S12: We were talking about indigestion and ulcers. Ulcers and everything that is stomach-related, usually must be accompanied by changes in the diet, by a change in the things that you eat and how you eat them. In that sense you really have to look at what the person is eating, the person's eating habits, to be able to define and stop the development of this type of situated. It is the same thing when it comes to indigestion or ***(empacho***), usually indigestion, basically due to bad digestion of food. This is usually treated with, again, a combination of herbs, combination of teas. Again, pennyroyal ***(poleo***) is very good. For both indigestion and (***empacho)*** – the difference between indigestion and (***empacho)*** is that (***empacho)*** has the very same symptoms of indigestion but they may last for a long time. It doesn't go away. It might come up with – your indigestion may produce vomiting and diarrhea, it can produce all that, and then it will be gone in a couple of days. (***Empacho***) will not go away, (***empacho***) will not go away.

MOJ: What's the difference between indigestion and ***empacho***?

S12***: Empacho*** lasts longer, that's the problem with (***empacho)***, see with (***empacho)***, you may take any kind of medication and you may take any kind of herb remedy and it doesn't – let me put it this way – it's like the food sits there and you cannot eliminate it. Usually, people with (***empacho***) will say, I feel like a ball in my stomach, I feel like a lump in my stomach. Usually what that is, is that food is not being properly digested, so it starts to decompose and stuff like that, so you have all the symptoms of indigestion but you don't get rid of it. In that sense, the first thing you have to do, is do what we call a "***santiguo***," you have to do some kind of massage to the stomach to force that out of the stomach into the intestine, into the intestine tract. After you do that you have to get rid of all those acids and things that stay in the stomach. You have to start drinking, usually, soft plants like sweet basil, like marjoram-these types of plants to ease in the stomach, then you start with very light [???]. You ease the patient back into it. Usually, that's the problem with (***empacho***). Indigestion can last for three or four days and you feel really rotten but (***empacho***) can last for weeks or months, depending on how stubborn you are. So, usually that is what you have to deal with.

MOJ: How much basil or marjoram do you take?

S12: I would recommend the person take two cups a day, in the morning and in the evening before retiring, and light broth, a very clear broth until the person builds their stomach back up. Also, I recommend oatmeal. Oatmeal is very good. There is one thing that we do with oatmeal, we make like a drink with it. We blend it with milk and we strain it. It will create a very sweet, almost sugar liquid and if you put it on your hand it coats.

MOJ: Like Aloe Vera?

S12: Yes. People with stomach problems like indigestion, gas, all kinds of intestinal problems, normally will be told to take oatmeal, either hot as a cereal, or blended with milk or with water if milk is not the thing. Oats are very important, are very good, that's why in houses where people don't like oatmeal as a hot cereal, it might me taken as a refreshment. It's a very refreshing drink-it's very good, it's excellent. With, diarrhea, again, we're going to the same issues, you have to see what is there. See, when it comes

to stomach problems, any kind of intestinal or stomach problems, you have to look at what is there, and usually in the case of diarrhea, a very good remedy to take would be, what we call "***agua de arroz***," rice water. You take the rice and you boil the rice, and that water with all that starch, that is what you drink.

MOJ: How much water to how much rice?

S12: Well, it's just like when you cook rice normally, but you don't let it dry. If you are using short grain rice, you take like, is it one cup? Yes it's one to one. If you use long grains rice then it is two to one, but you do not let it dry, you just let it boil and then you take that water, that starch water, that is what you give the person to drink, especially children. It creates a base for the stomach to hold on and to stop the diarrhea. That is very good.

MOJ: How many times during the day do you drink it?

S12: As long as the diarrhea lasts. You can't just say once or twice, you just go like, every time the person goes you give it to them. It has to build something, it has to build the stomach, protect the stomach and then all those acids and stuff like that and it is very good for stopping the acids from forming too and creates more of the same. So that is what you do. Again, there are other ways, other things people might use. People might blend different types of fruits together, they might use for example, guava. Guava is supposed to be a type of fruit that might give you constipation, so if you eat it when you have diarrhea then the idea is that you can stop the process. There are all these combinations. Again, like they say, every teacher has his own book, so there are hundredths of remedies. Stomach cramps – I've never treated that, neither have I treated parasites.

MOJ: What about constipation? What do you use for that?

S12: Well, that's what I was talking to you about, the constipation. For constipation you can take, let me see – prune juice is very good. You can drink a glass of prune juice before dinner. Another thing that is very good for constipation is if you take a tablespoon of olive oil before the meals and to take a couple of tablespoons throughout the day. Some people might not like olive oil, also it is very expensive, and they might take mineral oil, which is cheaper. Also, some people might use a combination of oils. One that I consider to be the nastiest, I think it is absolutely horrendous, is the egg oil. You have to beat the white of the egg, as if you were making a meringue, and then you let it sit. This yields an oil. I always say that it is so nasty that you don't want to take it again, so you just go. It's horrendous, it's terrible but it is very common. It is called ***(aceite de huevo***) egg oil.

MOJ: What is it called?

S12: (***Aceite de huevo***): egg oil. These are the things that I am familiar with because I was given that - A very sad memory (laughs). For hemorrhoids you can fill the tub with cold water to shrink the swelling. That helps. Using glycerin to moisten the area also helps. A person with hemorrhoids can also use a combination of herbs, for example, the leaves of the bullock's heart (***guanabana)*** tree, which is a tropical fruit and very similar

to the (***chirimoya***). It's very fragrant. The leaves are boiled and applied like compresses. This helps to shrink the swelling.

MOJ: How do you spell the name of that plant?

S12: G – U – A – N – A – B – A – N – A. So the leaves of that tree are very good and basically cold water, compresses are very good, or in extreme cases you might decide to go to the doctor. But we do not really treat this any longer because now we have preparation H readily available so now you can just go and get it. Many of these conditions are also found in competition with over the counter remedies so you have to decide, do I want to go through the trouble of getting the herb and going through the aggravation of trying to find out who has it and doing this and doing that, or do I want to take a short walk to the pharmacy. Usually we find out that what is more convenient always wins unless the person does not have the means of acquiring those remedies. Then, you fall back into the known remedies, into the home remedies. We find that usually we have that situation, that you are competing with already made remedies unless those conditions are created by supernatural events and then you say, you know I never had this condition before and I am having the nagging suspicion that there is something more and you go to the healer and get a consultation and he/she might say well lets do this. There are a lot of available remedies that may or may not be very good or whatever but you can start with that. People might start by going to the doctor and use over the counter remedies and when none of that works that is when they fall back to the healer and this type of thing. When the person comes back they might tell you I used this from the pharmacy, over the counter, I went to the doctor and then he/she gave me this, and this and this and this, and my condition is not disappearing, it's not improving. They have changed my prescription this amount of times and nothing is happening, something must be up that is not allowing this medication to work, so that is when you get into that.

MOJ: Now that's the last resort. When is the healer the first resort?

S12: When there is no money. See getting sick and dying are very expensive propositions. The last thing that you want to do is get sick and die because there is a lot of money involved in that. That is a luxury to be honest with you, so you do not want to do either one of them. You have the situation that if you do not have the money, if you don't have insurance, if you do not have the means to communicate – see the problem is how do you communicate? Sometimes people might have the money but they have this particular way of diagnosing and they want the doctor to look weird at them, do you see what I mean? They do not want to say, doctor I have been drinking this, I've been drinking that and it does get better. They do not want to be looked at as some weird type of situation, so if you do not have money and you know that going to the hospital is going to be like – and you go to emergency to LACUSC, it's about sixty dollars per visit for a couple of hours. If you go to a private hospital, if they take you number one, if they take you, that's thousands of dollars we're looking at. Myself, you know, I'm asthmatic, and I almost had a very bad situation at home, and before I got to the hospital I was using – because I didn't have insurance, so I knew that if I went to the hospital and they put me on a respirator It was going to cost me thousands of dollars that I don't have, so basically I treated myself and was able to handle it for a couple of months until I was ready to figure out what I was going to do. Then, actually, when I went to the doctor, I landed two days in the hospital. I'm sure that instead of those two days it might have been a

couple of weeks. When the bill came it was like eighteen thousand dollars or something like that, it was like what! See what I mean? So you have to wonder, do I really need to go to this hospital? People try to hang on to the last minute and it might be counterproductive, you might say, but sometimes you have to wonder, do I have eighteen thousand dollars just to lie on some fancy, shmancy bed, you know.

MOJ: How did you treat yourself?

S12: Oh, I did everything, I drank coffee, I did respirators, I did hot patches over the lungs, and I did foot baths. I did the whole thing.

MOJ: How did you use coffee?

S12: I drank it very strong. Coffee has something that helps the system, the chest, the lungs to expand, something having to do with the caffeine, and I love coffee, so (laughs) so maybe the placebo effect is there. Sometimes you have to wonder if you have that kind of money to go to a hospital. Then, they gave me one of those [???] that are fifty dollars, see what I mean? So you have to run into some money, and then you have to wonder, do I have that kind of money when I also have to pay this and that. Not having insurance is a real drag. A private hospital will not take you. They say that they will but that is a lie. They won't. If they see that you are really messed up, they will call the paramedics and send you somewhere else and they will say they do not have the special equipment to treat you, and that is a bunch of garbage. So this is the type of situation that people that do not have insurance, that do not speak the language go through. People get exasperated because they do not know how to explain what they have, because they cannot say, I have this, they have to make use of similes and metaphors, it feels like, it sounds like, and some people get very exasperated. I see it and it's pitiful. They don't want to be treated like ignorant fools just because they do not know how to express in another language their medical terms. How do you say that you have "***un empacho***?" People don't know what "***empacho***" is, but they can say, I have had the symptoms of indigestion for the last two months. That is contained in one word – "***empacho***." That's easy. In Latin America, anywhere, when you say I have an ***"empacho***," everyone knows what you are talking about. You go here, you go to White Memorial, you go to UCLA and you say you have an "***empacho***," and they say Oh my God, what is that! (laughs). You can't blame them. It's a complete lack of knowing the vernacular terms. What do you say, (***tengo un aire***), I have air in my back – what is that! It's a problem. Some people they may chose the healer, the community healer, when they really dread going into the hospital. Well, there are doctors that advertise themselves. You drive to Echo Park or Boyle Heights in East Los Angeles, you might see something that is very telling. You might read, Doctor so and so, and then below it will say, graduated from the university of whatever, and what that means is, basically, I know what you are talking about. If you come in and you say I have an "***empacho***," I know what an "***empacho***" is, I know what this is. They know these terms. They might say, graduated from the university of so and so, or came from, and they would give the country or state that he or she is coming from, and what that means, is basically, come as you are. I know the terms, and when you tell me you have an "***emapcho***," I have "***aire***," I know what you are talking about. That is what it is and usually people will go by that. So, that is a little known fact. The reason that I know is because I notice that the people that, the deeper you get into those neighborhoods, into East L.A., into Boyle Heights, those very small

doctor's offices, they will have that sign. Usually, that means that it is a person that is fully acknowledgeable of what is happening, especially if they are coming from areas with heavy native populations, so they know. They might not agree with it but they know what to pair it with, and people are more comfortable with that, see, so there is an issue there. The healer will never run out of business because people really feel they are being understood. People might say well I told the doctor what I have and he/she gave me something that is completely unrelated, and I feel the same-so those are the issues there. This is not the doctor's fault. It's just a lack of understanding on what those terms are.

MOJ: Next, is… I don't know.

S12: It's obesity.

MOJ: Then, I'm going to shortly turn it off because I have to go to class.

S12: Ok.

MOJ: Is there a treatment for obesity?

S12: Again, obesity, I have never treated obesity. Usually, obesity is not considered a problem, unless you say so. If you feel that being obese is a problem, then it is a problem. If you say that it is not a problem, then it is not. It is not considered a condition to be treated. See what I mean? Now, if you say, a woman delivered and she wants to get rid of all the weight she put on during gestation, and that is a problem. That is a situation that people might treat, and it might be treated by using different remedies, purges and stuff like that – by adjusting certain liquids and taking certain liquids. If you are overweight, that is not a condition, that is not an illness, it is not a disease, contrary to what many people may say. Now, if you are obese, and you have asthma, or you have problems of deformation of the legs and you have problems walking and stuff like that, then you can trace those conditions back to the fact that you are too heavy, and then that becomes not the source but one of the things that aggravates that condition. In that sense, people use different remedies to treat it but I have never treated obesity. I have never had a person come in and say, I'm too obese what should I do? They may come for other problems but obesity is not a problem. Remember that we still have that eighteenth century – I remember Robert Barnett, the director of the ??? museum, he's a very heavy set man, he's very big, and he used to say, because we went to Cuba together, and we were talking about weight problems, and we said, we're not fat, we're just eighteenth century prosperous (laughs). Remember that there is this mystique about a person that is heavy set. I mean, a child, that is heavy set, you say oh my God-the horror but you know sometimes these chubby cheeked kids are still seen as an epitome of a happy kid. Why do you want to lose weight? You look good (laughs).

MOJ: Ok, well thank you.

S12: No problem.

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